

# Dark Troubadour

Number Three



\$3.00

## OWL-STONE THE MINSTREL

### "The Last Minstrel" A 10 Year Retrospective

A collection of British folk-rock, traditional tunes and medieval music from the recording and performing of Owl-Stone the Minstrel on a one hour stereo cassette

1986 -- Rock & Roll Gypsies, Down Where The Drunkards Roll, A Woman Like You

1987 -- Farewell

1988 -- Thoryn Mac Wyrrd, Silver Spade

1989 -- John Riley, Ghosts On The Road

1990 -- We'll Sing Hallelujah

1991 -- The Blackbird, The Last Minstrel

1992 -- Vandy, Vandy, She Moves Through The Fair  
The Court of The Crimson King

1993 -- The Shaking of the Sheets, Cavalier of the Road

1994 -- Ruby Tears

1995 -- Polly Vaughn, Matty Groves

This collection contains unreleased material, out of print rarities, live performances from the Bryn Mawr Twelfth Night and Celtic Harvest 5 con certs, alternate takes and rare demos. There are performances featuring members of Ghosts On The Road, Carnival of Souls and A Company of Knaves, with guest appearances by Kacey Comini and Marie Alexander. Aside from originals and Trad. Arr., there are songs by Rodd Willings, Richard Thompson, King Crimson, Bert Jansch, Hearts & Flowers and Sir Walter Scott.

Owl-Stone performs on cittern, mandola, mandolin, Celtic harp, guitar, whistle, keyboards, psaltery and sings.

\$10 US; \$15 Foreign. All orders to Chuck Owston, Box 162, Ardara, PA 15615 USA





### The Green Room.

THE Clown turned his powdered face to the mirror.

"If to be fair is to be beautiful," he said, "who can compare with me in my white mask?"

"Who can compare with him in his white mask?" I asked of Death beside me.

"Who can compare with me?" said Death, "for I am paler still."

"You are very beautiful," sighed the Clown, turning his powdered face from the mirror.



## A WORD FROM YE OLDE EDITOR ...

Well, here at long last is Dark Troubadour No. 3. This was supposed to be last Autumn's issue, but for many reasons it was delayed. I have a lot of good material that I wanted to get out before calling *finis* to the magazine.

So, here you have the final issue in the Dark Troubadour trilogy (I feel like J.R.R. Tolkien). This one's heavy on the fantasy-horror material, both fiction, artwork and poetry. There are also a few music reviews, but not nearly as many as last issue. Here's the reason why.

Since last issue I've become an Associate Editor at Porthole Magazine. No, it's not a yachting publication, nor a sailing mag, or even a Pirate fanzine ('ar, 'ar, 'ar). It's the American Fairport (FairPORT - get it) Convention magazine, and it will deal with all aspects of the Greatest Folk-Rock band in the world, as well as spinoff groups and artists, folk-rock music in general. It will literally cover the whole field of this unique and very neglected musical art form. Issue No. 1 will be out any day now (it may already be there on your local newsstand or book or record store). It is the brainchild of Editor and Publisher Rob Lehrman. Also on the staff are my old bandmates from the gothic-folk rock outfit, Revelations in Black, Dewey Gurrall and Jim Capp.

The first issue contains an interview with Fairport, ex-Jethro Tull bassist, Dave Pegg (pictured with Dewey in Dark Troubadour No. 2). The reviews I would have put in here are in Porthole instead, plus an article on The Ghost of Matty Groves, about the variants of that olde song. When you read the story about the All Souls' Band in this issue, you'll know what I mean.

Also, check out the greal new comics from Green Man Press, 'Ballads and Sagas,' drawn by artist Charles Vess and scripted by some of the best in the field. Look for the first two issues at your favorite comix store, they feature illustrated versions of three Steeleye Span songs, 'Thomas the Rhymer,' 'King Henry,' and 'The False Knight of the Road,' plus Pentangle's 'Sovay.' Coming next 'Barbara Allen.' Don't miss it.

I hope you enjoy this issue. Thanks for the support in the past. I'll see you in the pages of Porthole.

Chuck Owston, Editor





R. Chetwynd-Hayes

Well, dear reader, here we have a real treat for you, an interview with England's "Crown Prince of Chill," Ronald Chetwynd-Hayes, conducted by our London correspondent, Salamander Scarlett, plus a gruesome short story sent to us from Ronald himself. It's guaranteed to raise a few goosebumps ...

## INTERVIEW WITH RONALD CHETWYND-HAYES

Greetings from England! I have here an interview with a man who has been scaring people for over 40 years with anthologies other peoples' stories and then his own short stories and novels, Ron Chetwynd-Hayes. He's is winner of the Horror Writers of America "Lifetime Achievement Award" (a Bram Stoker) and a Special Award (1988) from the British Fantasy Society.

Ron has some new chills coming up. A book of vampire stories, two or three new novels, one of which may be made into a Hammer Film. Also a possible TV series based on his "Psychic Detective" characters, Fred and Francis. He is also working on a historical novel with a supernatural theme called "Henry, Lord of Blyth."

DT: Ron, who are your major influences?

RCH: Alexander Dumas (*The Three Musketeers*) for the latest, the French Sir Walter Scott. For crime, Ernest Raymond's *We The Accused*, based on the Crippen Case.

DT: What about for horror?

RCH: Lewis Carrol, but I've basically kept to my own ideas. Very few people have I tried to copy.

DT: Lewis Carrol? How?

RCH: He wrote a fantasy story, and "The Monster Club"

(One of Ronald's books, which was made into a movie here in England, starring Vincent Price, Donald Pleasance and John Carradine as *Ronald (Chetwynd Hayes)* when I look back, has much in common.

DT: The old dreaded question: How do you get your ideas?

RCH: Sit down at the typewriter, touch the keys and generally, out pops a short story.

DT: Your story, "Acquiring A Family" and also "No One Lived There" rely heavily on a revulsion of rats. Care to explain?

RCH: When I was in the army a monstrous great rat used to come out, run around the room, jump on my bed, and it had a nasty habit of nibbling projecting parts such as an earlobe and/or a nose.

DT: "Acquiring A Family" made Karl Edward Wagner's *Year's Best Horror*. How did that come about?

RCH: Karl had chosen another story, but having read "Acquiring A Family" said, "I couldn't resist those rats."

DT: Have you had any experiences with the supernatural?

RCH: Good heavens, yes.

DT: Please elaborate.

RCH: Having read Dennis Wheatley's *Strange Conflict*, which deals with his heroes fighting the Nazis on the astral plane, I had a shot at astral plane walking myself. And once I succeeded. I found myself standing on the landing well aware that my body was sleeping in the room opposite. This knowledge brought about a blast of pure terror and I awoke in



my own bed. This is true.

DT: Your "Clavering Grange" stories, or at least some, were available in the States in two collections. It Clavering Grange based on a real place and/or real events?

RCH: Loosely. On a small village in Kent called Daddington.

DT: But no supernatural events.

RCH: No.

DT: You were quite close to Karl Edward Wagner. Anything you want to say about Karl?

RCH: He accepted four or five of my stories for *Year's Best Horror*. Karl was most certainly one of the leading editors and short story writers in the field. I'm proud to remember that he gave me a signed copy of the Scream Press edition on *In A Lonely Place*.

DT: What about the Hammer Film deal?

RCH: Over the years I have written seven long stories which are purported to come from the casebook of "the world's only Psychic Detective." I was recently encouraged by Hammer Films to write a complete novel (he has -- *The Psychic Detective*) featuring the same character and his glamorous assistant, Frederika Masters; commonly known as Fred. Having published the book through Robert Hale, Hammer has now purchased an option for a full length film.

DT: Any comments about Milton Sobotsky's movie versions of "Beyond the Grave" and "The Monster Club?" (Sadly unavailable in the USA).

RCH: Milton was a very nice man and did his best to help me.

DT: How does it feel to see yourself portrayed by John Carradine, and why did they decide to use you as a character?

RCH: I made an anagram out of Milton's name, LIMTON. This pleased him greatly, so he engaged the veteran actor John Carradine (now sadly passed on) to play R. Chetwynd-Hayes. Unfortunately, the actor at the time was 74 years of age and suffered from arthritis, which resulted in badly deformed hands and feet. One woman came to me and said, "We made a mistake there."

DT: I think he did a fine job, even looking like you and picking up your mannerisms.

RCH: John and I were photographed together several times, but for some reason the photos were never published.

DT: Why did a fine, funny/scary movie like "The Monster Club" (not to be confused with the puerile "Monster Squad") never get released in the US, in spite of winning the critics award in Berlin?

RCH: There was no publicity. Milton offered to do a tour selling the film, but they wouldn't let him.

DT: It's a collector's item now. A cult classic.

RCH: The best, in my opinion, was "From Beyond The Grave." All star cast. Diana Dors, David Warner and Leslie Anne Downe.

DT: Is it available in the US? It sounds familiar.

RCH: I'd imagine. It's available everywhere.

DT: Thank you, Ronald, Chetwynd-Hayes.

# Why?

by Ronald Chetwynd-Hayes

## Why?

'Mummy, why is your face all lumpy and green?'

'It's very rude to ask such questions, my darling.'

*For a while the only sound to disturb the dust insulated silence was the drip-drip of water falling into the old-old iron basin. Then:*

'But I only want to know, Mummy. And your nose ...'

'Hush, hush, my darling.'

'Is so like a lump of blue fungus. You must know that blue and green do not really go together. After all grass does not grow in the sky. What are we having for dinner?'

'Gentleman's noses and lady's toesies served up with marrowbone jelly.'

'That will be very nice. How can you pluck when your fingers are only ...'

'Do not be unkind to your mummy, my darling.'

'... jagged stumps. I'm sorry, Mummy - don't cry red tears; they are rolling down your green cheeks and making funny furrows and I want to laugh. But I mustn't because your feelings are hurt. Why are your feelings hurt, Mummy?'

'Because I do not want to be reminded that I am not as I was. Once I was very beautiful.'

'Why did you become so very ugly, Mummy?'

'Really this is too much!'

'Why?'

'Stop asking why. It is a most terrible word. There never has been such a dreadful, hurtful, terrifying word since men first learned to talk.'

'Why?'

'Stop it ... stop it! If you repeat that word much more I will go to pieces. Do you hear me?'

'Yes, Mummy. Why ...'

'Go and play in the cool lonely places, my darling. Bathe your hands in deep still water, but never accept a kiss from the sun, or your beauty will crumble ... run ... drip ...'

'Why ...? Sorry, Mummy. Were you kissed by the sun?'

'Go and play, child. Come home if the clouds part.'

'What are you doing here, young lady?'

'I've come to play. I always play here. Why?'

'A churchyard is hardly the place for a beautiful little girl. Aren't you cold? The sky is threatening snow before nightfall.'

'I'm never - never cold. What are you doing?'

'Digging a grave, me dear. A nice deep one so old Mrs Jenkins can sleep undisturbed.'

'Why?'

'What do you mean - why? It be only right and proper that the poor old soul be left to rest in peace. That's what R.I.P. means on all them tombstones. Now you best go home and leave me to do me work. Do you live nearby?'

'Over there.'

'I'm sure you don't live there, me dear. That's an old family vault. My word, you wouldn't like it in there.'

'Why?'

'Well, 'tis full of dead people. The Hargraves family sleep in there and the last ones died - oh, a hundred year ago or more. Dreadful folk, they were. Nobody would want anything to do with them - alive or dead.'

'Why?'

'That's not a story for pretty little ears like yours. Now, you mustn't stand about here talking to an old fogey like me. You'll catch your death of cold. The wind cuts like a knife.'

*The pick said, 'Click-clink' as it bit into the iron-hard earth; the spade chattered when black cold clods tried to flee before its delving blade. A trapped wind-child moaned in the old church belfry.*

'You still 'ere, me dear? Funny, I could have sworn you weren't 'ere a moment since when I turned my head. You look so white, child ... and them slanting green eyes of yours ... makes me think of a cat. Darn me if they don't.'

'Why won't you tell me about those people who live - who sleep over there? The Hargraves family you said.'

'T'aint the time or place to talk about folk long dead. Nor proper to a sweet child like you.'

'I want to know ... I want to know. If you don't tell me I'll make all the worms in the churchyard wriggle up your legs. Fiddle-de-dee you must not laugh at me! I cannot stand laughter.'

'Now, now. You mustn't get into a pet, Missy. If a man can't laugh in this cruel 'ard world, there ain't much hope for him and that's a fact. As for telling you about them Hargraves, why, child, you wouldn't sleep tonight if I did.'

'I always sleep when my tummy is full. You must tell me. You must.'

'Very well. But I don't want your father on me neck for scaring the pants of you. Begging your pardon for the expression.'

'My daddy fell to pieces long ago.'

'I must say you've got a funny way of putting things. Well, the Hargraves were an old family, proud as Lucifer and three times as bad. They lived in the old house under Makepiece Hill - 'tis ruins now and 'as been since my grandad was a boy. It caught fire about a hundred year ago and it's said the parson of that time knew more about 'ow it happened than maybe he should.'

'Why?'

'You may well ask why, although I'm thinking it's a word that comes to you too easy. There were only two Hargraves left then, the rest of the family 'aving gone to the devil along crooked paths. The two who were left lived in mortal sin.'

Brother and sister. Aye, Elizabeth and Henry Hargraves. Dark whispering about them there was, but I won't go into details.'

'Why?'

'Because they're not for young and innocent ears like yours, that's why. But that was only the half of it. T'was said they had traffic with some 'eathenish god called ... I can't remember. T'was an outlandish name.'

'Beldaza?'

'Aye! Fancy you knowing that! And in return for never dying they had to become ghouls.'

'What are ghouls?'

'The questions you ask! Ghouls, me dear, well – it's said – but all nonsense you understand. Silly tales told by old women round the kitchen fire. But they say ghouls eat the dead.'

'What else should anyone eat but the dead.'

'I won't say you 'aven't a point there, although I wouldn't have put it like that. But when you come right down to it, what's the old Sunday joint but the dead? A lump of dead mutton. But you see – ghouls don't eat dead animals. They 'as a partiality for dead people. And that's bad. Very bad.'

'Why?'

'Now that's enough, Missy! 'Ow were you brought up to ask a question like that? Dead people must be buried peaceful like and left to sleep until the big trumpet blows in the sky. But I've said too much already. Now you go on 'ome like a good little girl and stop worrit me.'

'Didn't they have a little girl like me?'

'There you go again asking flaming questions. Who are you talking about?'

'Elizabeth and Henry Hargraves.'

'Darn me breeches! You've got no right to ask such questions at your age. No right at all.'

'Did they?'

'Blast me shinbones, I'll not ...'

'I want to know. You will tell me ... you will ...'

'All right. All right. There's no need to flash yer green eyes

and bare yer teeth at me. Fair gives me the shivers. T'was said that Elizabeth Hargraves was big with child when she and 'er brother fled from the burning house.'

'What's - big with child?'

'Darn me ... She was about to 'ave a child. Maybe a little girl.'

'And the little girl would be a little girl for a long time, wouldn't she? Because if she was never going to die - then she'd take a long time to grow up.'

'I don't know about that. I 'ave heard tell that ghouls can't live in sunlight.'

'If they are only kissed by the sun they only turn green.'

'Close yer mouth, girl. I want you out of this churchyard - now. Get. Do you 'ear me?'

'And sometimes their noses turn blue. Like blue fungus.'

'If you're not gone in one minute, I'll put you across my knee and the devil take the consequences.'

'If you touch me I'll call my mummy.'

'You can call yer flaming grandmother if you like ...'

'My grandmummy could not come because her legs dropped off. But although Mummy has turned green and her nose is like blue fungus, she can still move very fast. In fact she can even run - on all fours.'

'Why you 'orrible little ... little ... little ... Oh, my Gawd!'

'MUMMY. MUMMY.'

*The screech of rusted hinges, the slither of imperfect feet, the sigh of rustling clothing that is being caressed by the cold-cold wind.*

'Mummy, the nasty man wants to hit me. Mummy, I don't like him.'

'Keep away ... I don't believe in you. I mustn't ... I mustn't. Oh, gentle Lord, give me the blessed gift of disbelief. Go away ... I'll 'it yer with me shovel ... I will ...'

'Mummy, he's going green like you.'

'My God, it's prancing about on all fours! It's like a green-monkey! A prancing and a jumping ... Ahaaaaaaa ...'

'Mummy, there's no need for you to claw him anymore. He's quite, quite dead. Doesn't he look funny all screwed up

like that? His face is purple now and his eyes are bulging and Mummy – his teeth have fallen out. Mummy – why have his teeth fallen out? Why?’

‘Mummy, are we going to eat the nasty man?’

‘Not yet, my darling. He’s not ripe. Later, when the big nightlight is large over the church steeple, I’ll burrow a new tunnel and then – we’ll see.’

‘Mummy, won’t we run short one day? There are so many tunnels.’

‘You mustn’t have such dark thoughts, my darling. Beldaza will always provide. But you must never talk to a Sunday-dinner eater again. If the nasty man had not died, others of his kind might have come looking for us.’

‘Why?’

‘Because the usual hate the unusual. Always play in cool empty places and bathe your hands in still deep water.’

‘Were you very – very beautiful, Mummy?’

‘Men like to say so, my darling.’

‘Will I be very beautiful one day?’

‘If you never allow the cruel sun to kiss your white face, or touch holy things with your long fingers.’

‘Oh, mummy – why? Why? Wh-y-y-y-y ...’





## HEAVENLY VOICES III COMPILATION Hyperium Records

This CD expands upon the concept of beautiful female vocals started on last year's double CD boxed set. It brings together 18 different bands from several different countries, from New York's Where I Wake Warm to Italy's Black Rose. Every song is a delight, presenting different musical styles, but still keeping the central theme of exceptional and dramatic female voices. Some of the best examples are Bel Canto's "Dewy Field," the 3rd and The Mortal's "Shamen," and the very original Merlons of Rehemiah's "Romanoir."

If you buy *any* compilation this year, make it Heavenly Voices III (and get the first two if you haven't already). None of these releases should be missed.

Debbie Rush

### Camerata Mediolanense MUSICA RISERVATA

This Italian band deserves recognition for being one of the few original acts in the ethereal music category. Their first CD is like taking a journey to parts unknown. Their style is similar to old Ordo Equitum Solis, but with a very different and sometimes medieval edge. The music is very beautiful indeed, and vocals are shared by three women and two men. It is like an ethereal opera, the exceptional tracks are "Toccato In Solmin," "Rottumo," and "The Trilogio Della Danza Magica," which are the most dramatic three songs on the CD. They complement each other beautifully. Most of the songs are in Italian, but the language barrier is unimportant with music like this. If you can find it, it should be part of every ethereal music lover's collection.

Debbie Rush



### THE INVITATION

Chained by fears the girl waits  
Depression has come, her existence bleak  
A dark foreboding secret.

Beyond the window lies the forest  
Howling winds  
Like banshees, they call her name

Carlaine

Death is everywhere  
Stench permeates the surrounding walls  
Sweet pungent odors have come to entice

Clearly the Invitation calls  
Seething within shall cease  
Fears will depart

Polyandrium awaits

Carol Lewis

## THE HOLLOWING

THE HOLLOWING is the latest offering by Robert Holdstock, who first took us into England's haunted Ryhope Wood in his award winning novel, *Mythago Wood*.

What is a mythago? Literally, the "image of the myth" -- the myth-image -- which grows from mankind's collective unconsciousness. All of the archetypes ... the Hood figure (the Hooded Man of legend who later solidified into the Robin Hood tales) ... the Jack In The Green .. neolithic images of heroes later called Hercules and Jason and Arthur ... red haired women in green named Gwenneth, primal images of Guenivere. The origins of paganism grow and thrive in Ryhope Wood ... not benign, New Age sort of neo-paganism laced with 20th Century politically correctness.

Not at all. This is the primal paganism that pictured Herne the Hunter, grim antlered god leading his Wild Hunt, and woe to those who be out when the Hunt goes by. This paganism is where they strap a living man to a wild horse, tie bundles of sticks and twigs around his body and set him afire, screaming his death song through the night. This is where they sacrifice a Corn Maiden the Corn King, gruesome god of agriculture, so that her fresh virgin blood will insure a good crop for the next year.

Holdstock has a grip on what ancient paganism was *really* all about. In his books (four in all) he takes you on a journey into the woods, where a mythago might shoot an arrow through your eye. A friend of mine started reading *Mythago Wood* and woke up at night screaming, literally believing that mythagoes were after him. Don't laugh. This is the most realistic fantasy world I've ever encountered. And, if you're out in the Woods (not in Frick Park, I mean out in the Real Woods, the primal forest), and you catch sight of a quick image in your peripheral vision, you'd better be careful ... it might be a mythago.

In *The Hollowing*, Holdstock takes us into Ryhope Wood via the dreams of Alex, a young boy. Entwined is the ancient legend of Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight. We're

TAKEN INTO A PLACE OF SANCTUARY, A RUINED CATHEDRAL IN THE MIDST OF THE WOOD. THE WOOD IS MUCH BIGGER WITHIN THAN IT SEEMS FROM WITHOUT, LAYERS UPON LAYERS OF TIME AND ARCHETIME, PATHWAYS LEADING INTO BARBARIC AGES OF ANTIQUITY.

AND OUT THERE IN THE WOOD, WAITING AND HUNGRY IS THE MYSTERIOUS KILLER KNOWN ONLY TO ALEX AS "THE GIGGLER," BECAUSE OF THE SOUND HE MAKES WHEN HE RIPS A HUMAN BEING TO BLOODY SHREDS.

ALEX'S FATHER MAKES A HEROIC ATTEMPT TO RESCUE HIS SON, AND IN SO DOING, MEETS A MYTHAGO BASED ON THE LEGENDARY CHARACTER OF GREEK MYTH, JASON. BUT THIS JASON IS NOT THE HANDSOME, CLEAN CUT HERO OF THE MOVIES ... HE'S A VILE, BITTER OLD MAN OBSESSED WITH DEATH, A COLLECTOR OF GOLDEN FLEECES, CURSED TO ROAM THE WORLD WITHOUT A REAL PURPOSE, EXCEPT TO DESTROY.

WHEN YOU ENTER RYHOPE WOOD VIA HOLDSTOCK'S BOOKS, YOU LITERALLY SMELL THE ROTTING VEGETATION, THE LEAF MOULD, THE FUNGUS, THE DECAYING CARCASSES OF THE DEAD. THE COLD OF WINTER PERMEATES YOUR BONES, THE AUTUMN RAINS SOAK YOU TO THE CORE, THE SUMMER SUN BEATS DOWN UNMERCIFULLY. BY TAKING A DIFFERENT PATH, CAN ENTER A DIFFERENT TIME AND A DIFFERENT SEASON. THE FRIENDLY GREENJACK YOU MET IN THE SUMMER HAS SUDDENLY BECOME THE DREADED WOLF-LIKE SCARAG IN WINTER. IT'S NOT A FUN PLACE.

HERE IN THE DARKEST RECESSES OF THE HUMAN MIND, ALL OF THE NIGHTMARISH ARCHETYPES OF MYTH, LEGEND AND FAERY COME TO FRIGHTENING LIFE. WIZARDS HERE ARE NOT "GOOD OLD GANDALF" TYPES, BUT PAINTED NEOLITHIC SHAMANS IN FEATHERS AND BLUE WOOL, WHO WILL SPLIT YOUR SPINE WITH A STONE-TIPPED SPEAR JUST TO APPEASE SOME SAVAGE FOREST GOD. THEY'RE DIRTY, RANK AND THEY'LL KILL YOU JUST FOR FUN.

DOESN'T SOUND MUCH LIKE MERLIN EITHER...

NOW YOU KNOW WHY I ALWAYS CARRY AN IRON SWORD AS WELL AS A WALKING STICK WHEN I GO FOR A WALK IN THE WOODS. IT'S NOT JUST BECAUSE OF THE STRAY DOGS...

Chuck Owston

ANGEL by Armand Bosconia

Out of the skies he fell  
with a whisper  
of silken wings  
against the crisp morning air.  
A spot of sunlight  
upon the foliage below  
was the only guide  
of his descent to earth.  
With a fluttering  
of wingtips against branches,  
the angel finally came to rest  
on the same soil  
from which he was created.

A single dew drop  
upon his golden wings  
was the only sign  
of life as he  
inhaled his last  
remaining breath  
A tear drop ran down  
the side of his pale white face  
and slowly disappeared  
into the earth as a  
symbol of his death.

## FORGOTTEN SOULS by Armand Bosconia

Dead souls  
beneath old forgotten  
graves  
stare out  
of the musty  
mausoleums  
they've inherited  
and silently weep  
for their forgiveness

The flowers of death  
which once bloomed  
now wither  
and die  
in the chilling darkness  
of the isolated cemet'ry

A song of death  
whispers through the trees  
as the winds  
of seasons past  
make another visit  
to the  
forgotten souls





## THE ALL SOULS' BAND

by Chuck Owston

### 1. Roderick The Red

A cloaked figure in a feathered slouch hat sat on a bench in front of the deserted churchyard. Light from a street lamp filtered through trees, creating a patchwork design of shadows on the ground. A soft night wind sighed through the branches, dislodging some of the golden leaves. In the west a crescent moon hung in the sky.

The tall man leaned over a dark stained lute and softly plucked an ancient modal melody. A young couple, their purple and crimson hair styled in spiky points, walked by, chains clinking on their leather jackets and boots. They stopped to look at the musician.

He paid them no mind, but in a raspy voice began to sing:

We come every year in the October mist  
Playing our autumn tune  
We're gone when the leaves have fallen from the trees  
Underneath a harvest moon.

"Hey, man," interrupted the young man. "That's pretty good. Know anything by the Pogues?"

The singer looked up, his eyes blue in the lamplight. He stopped playing and examined the two before him. Then he shook his head.

"No, most of my material is traditional. That is, what I don't write myself."

"Oh, I dig trad," said the youth. "That's why I dig the Pogues. They have that trad sound. Them and the Waterboys, and The Men They Couldn't 'Ang." Then, he added as an afterthought, "And the Oyster Band."

"I'm not familiar with them," said the singer.

"My dad's into trad too. The older stuff," said the young woman "He's got some Fairport and Steeleye Span. And that old Traffic record, "*John Barleycorn*."

The singer smiled at that

"An old friend of mine," he said in a wistful voice.

"Who?" asked the girl, wide eyed, "Steve Winwood? The lead singer of Traffic?"

"No, John Barleycorn," the musician answered with a laugh. "We go back a long way."

"Oh yeah," the youth laughed. "I get it. Barleycorn . . . you mean brew."

The singer began to sing again.

There were three men all come from the west  
Their fortunes for to try  
And these three men made a solemn vow  
John Barleycorn would die

"That's it," said the girl. She reached into her coffin shaped purse and withdrew something. She dropped a pound coin into the fellow's lute case.

"Many thanks," the older man said, and continued his song. When he finished, the couple waved and walked off, talking about the new alternative groups that were drawing from trad roots.

Roderick the Red watched them go, absently picking out the melody of the song he'd just finished. He looked up at the sound of approaching footsteps from the opposite direction.

"I thought I heard you singing about your favorite subject," said a youthful voice. Another cloaked figure stepped into the light, a mandolin slung over his shoulder.

"Jaahn!" Roderick shouted, "It's good to see you. I knew you'd come this year. We've missed you at the last few Reunions of the band."



"Too busy," Jon admitted, "but I'm here now."

"Aye," said Roderick, looking up at the crescent moon. "It takes one back . . ."

"This is the first of October," said Jon. "The same date we met years ago, back in the village of Mosside. Yes, the very first time we ever played together . . . at the Green Wolf."

"More years than I care to remember. Look at my hair, Jaahn. Before long they'll be calling me Roderick the Grey."

"Have you seen any of the others?" asked Jon.

"Zara and Lithon were by a while ago. They went down to the pub to see about playing there."

"I wonder if the innkeeper is as much of a tightwad as old Zweige was?"

"Nobody is," said Roderick with a laugh. "You know, Jaahn, I miss the old days."

"That's why I love these Reunions. It takes me back. You know, life was so much simpler back then."

"That's why they call them the 'good old days,'" Jon answered, his face split in a grin.

"Ten years from now they'll be calling these the good old days."

"Sad but true." Roderick nodded. "You never realize what you've got till it's gone."

But, you know, Jaahn, we've still got the music. As long as we've got that, we'll never really grow old."

Just then a short blonde girl in leather breeks, silken blouse and an array of coloured scarves sauntered up, a tambourine in her hand. It jingled as she walked. Her green eyes opened in amazement.

"Jon!" she cried. She rushed forward and hugged him. "It's so good to see you this year."

"Zara!" He hugged her back.

"Is Irania coming?" the girl asked.

"She'll be along in awhile," Jon said.

"It'll be like old times," she said, a smile on her red lips. "We've missed you two. Somehow, the band just isn't the same without you."

"We've missed all of you too."

"Zara?" queried Roderick. "Did you talk to the innkeeper?"

She nodded. "He wants us every weekend in October, Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights."

"That's good news indeed," said Roderick. "Did you explain about our music?"

"He seems in agreement," she answered.

"Did you tell him that we don't play the Pogues, or the Waterboys, or the Men They Couldn't Hang . . ."

"And no Soup Dragons or Levelers either," she said, grinning. "And no Sisters of Mercy."

"I remember when it was the Beatles and the Stones that we didn't play . . ." said Jon, "or Bob Dylan or Donovan . . . my that seems like ages ago."

"By the way," asked Roderick, putting his lute in its case. "What's the name of this place?"

"An unusual name," answered Zara. "*The Moon Under Water.*"

## 2. Transatlantic Call

It had all started with a phone call at 5 a.m.

Hey, Mark Waller thought, who could be calling at five o'clock in the morning? Probably some drunk with a wrong number. And I just got to sleep an hour ago.

He fumbled with the phone in the dark, finally getting hold of the receiver.

"Yeah?" he asked in a less than pleasant voice.

"What do you say?" came a voice on the other end. Immediately Mark recognized the English Midlands accent.

"Richard? Don't you realize what time it is on this side of the Atlantic?"

"Oh yeah, right," came the overly cheery voice. "Kind of forgot, you know. Top o' the mornin' and all that rot."

Mark had been right. It was a drunk. Not an ordinary one, but a British one, no doubt calling him from some pub in London.

"Mark, old man," Richard went on, "you've got to get away and come over. I heard the most incredible band. Heard them last night. Unlike anybody I've heard do our kind of music."

"Oh yeah? But couldn't you wait till it's daytime over here? I just got to bed a little while ago and I'm beat."

"Listen, this won't wait. . ."

"How many pints have you had anyway?"

"Listen," Richard repeated. "I'm not drunk. I'm just excited. I heard a band last night that puts 'em all to shame. Imagine a folk-rock group that sounds like a combination of Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span in their early, formative days, with something extra added. Playing on antique instruments no less."

"Sounds like you're hallucinating. I thought you gave up acid about fifteen years ago," said Mark. "Or have you decided that life's too dull these days."

"No, I'm not high," answered Richard. "It's true. I heard them here just last night."

"Where's here?" asked Mark, finally getting awake enough to be really interested in this madman's conversation.

"*The Moon Under Water*. It's a pub about fifteen minutes walk from the Hounslow Central tube station. Curious place. It's got big, colorful paintings of squids and octopi and moons under water.

"Somehow this doesn't sound like you've given up mind altering chemicals," Mark wonder if someone had spiked Richard's bitter.

"Oh, it's a great place! But listen, this band is fab!"

Nobody in Mark's neighborhood had used the word "fab" since 1967.

"Listen, Mark, they've got two girl singers . . . one reminds you of Maddy Prior and the other sounds something like Marianne Faithful in her folk days . . . remember, back in '66. You've got to hear them. Apparently they're local blokes. Buskers. No record company, no agent. Just like to play."

Mark was sitting up in bed, wide awake at last. The import of what Richard was saying was finally getting through to him.

"Listen," Mark said, "if what you say is true, I definitely am interested. I've got some time off coming to me, now that summer is over."

"Now this sounds like the old Mark Waller to me," said Richard. "If you liked those two tapes I sent you of the Cropredy Festival . . ."

"Liked 'em. I loved 'em. I wish I'd been there. I've heard that it was the largest folk festival in Europe this past summer."

Mark had really wanted to attend Fairport Convention's 25th Reunion concert at Cropredy, but couldn't get off work back in mid-August.

"A Thames Valley hobby told me that they estimated about 25,000 people," said Richard. "I never did hear the exact figure, but it was like being at Woodstock. It took me over two hours to get from the main road to just the parking area. Then it was about a mile walk to the festival grounds. Man, everyone was there . . . Swarbrick, Thompson, Ashley Hutchings, even Bruce Rowland . . . no relative of mine. Plus, the current Fairport lineup. Dave Pegg even sent me a backstage pass, bless him. I even met Robert Plant!"

"Robert Plant?" Mark was amazed. "The lead singer from Led Zeppelin? You met him? What was he doing there? I heard him on the tapes, but I couldn't figure how he fit in."

"He used to be in a band with Dave Pegg years ago, when they were both living in Birmingham. I think it was a blues band. He did four songs with Fairport on Friday night."

"Amazing."

"As I was saying, these I heard last night can give them all a run for their money. You've got to come over and check them out. They're going to be playing in this area this whole month of October. Bring you little recorder and lots of tapes."

"They don't mind if you tape them?" Mark asked. He recalled a few ugly scenes at recent local concerts when audience members tried taping the bands. Everybody seemed to have a fear of bootleggers, even the unknown local bands.

"Not at all. I talked to their lead singer, their male lead singer . . . his name's Roderick, sort of reminds you of an older Trevor Lucas."

"Older?"

"Well, this bloke's been around. He looks like someone out of Dickens. There's a lot of grey in his long red hair, and he's obviously spent a lot of time of the road. He plays a seven string lute."

"Seven string?"

"It's got a doubled third string . . . one's an octave string. It gives it quite a ringing tone when he strums chords."

"I'm definitely intrigued," said Mark.

"Don't forget your mandolin," said Richard. "I'll bet they'd let you sit in on some of the jigs and reels."

"Great. I hardly go anywhere without it anyway. By the way, what's the name of this outfit?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? Odd name. They're called the All Souls' Band."

### 3.. The Moon Under Water

Mark never got used to the London tube trains. They rattled and shook like they were coming apart. The ride from Heathrow No. 4 to Hounslow Central wasn't long, but it gave him time to reflect on his trip.

He'd come in on British Airways, winging in over the Irish Sea in the morning mist. They'd left Philadelphia last night at about ten, after an hour layover. A strong tailwind made the flight about five hours in length. The movie had been terrible, so he tried sleeping. All to no avail. Every time he tried to grab a few winks, the stewardesses were giving him something to eat or drink.

The older lady next to him, once she spotted the mandolin case, introduced herself as a folk musician "of the old school." She talked incessantly about the New York folk scene of the early 60's. He tried to explain that folk music was just his hobby. She wasn't listening. She went on and on about the Workers' Movement, Pete Seeger, Bobby Dylan ("Before he sold out to do that awful rock stuff"), Carolyn Hester, Joan Baez, Phil Ochs, and a multitude of others. Mark listened politely, but anytime he tried to inject something into the conversation, found himself completely ignored.

It had not been a fun flight.

He had talked for a few minutes to a couple of cute stewardesses while he stood in line to use the rest room. They, also, had seen the mandolin case.

"So, what kind of music do you play?" asked the short one. She had a Scots accent.

"Folk music," Mark answered. "Mostly British folk music . . . and some Celtic stuff."

"I don't know anything about that. What's British folk music?" asked the other, a tall, dark haired girl with penetrating grey eyes.

"Well, really it's folk-rock. Traditional music with a rock beat . . . like . . . Fairport Convention. . ."

She nodded. "Oh yes, I've heard of them."

"Have you?" asked her companion. "What do they play?"

"Cowboy music," answered the tall stewardess smugly.

"Oh," the Scots girl said, looking bewildered.

Mark rolled his eyes. "Cowboy music? They play the music of your country . . . English music! It's certainly very far removed from cowboy music!"

Both girls looked at him as though he'd gone completely bonkers.

Luckily the restroom was vacated at that moment. Mark entered the small space, shaking his head and muttering under his breath. "Cowboy music . . . give me a break!"

Mark was so absorbed in his thoughts that he almost missed his stop. He exited the tube train and stood on the platform. It started raining, a fine drizzle.

He went down the stairs from the platform and exited the station. His lodgings, the Shalimar Hotel, was a twenty minute walk from the station. He came to the end of the street,

made a right turn and continued on his way. By now the rain was beginning to come down by the bucketfuls

Mark hurried along, his head down. He was getting drenched. Across the street he saw a pub and noticed the black sign that hung in front. It pictured a crescent moon in gold, superimposed over ocean waves.

*The Moon Under Water!*

He ran across the street, almost getting elbowed by a dark red Vauxhall that was coming a lot faster than he had estimated. He could hear the driver cursing and raising his fingers in what looked like the peace sign. Obviously that meant something different over here.

Mark ducked into the pub. He was soaked. So far that trip had been pretty much of a bust. Hopefully this All Souls' Band was worth all the aggro that he'd experienced to this point.

Mark sat up at the bar.

"What'll it be?" asked the barman.

"How about a cup of coffee?" Mark asked. It was a little early for serious drinking, and he hadn't had any coffee on the plane, because he'd read somewhere that caffeine increased the effects of jet lag.

"From the States?" the barman queried. He was a big fellow with a handlebar mustache. He cast a critical eye at Mark's drenched jacket. "Didn't swim, did you?"

Mark shook his head, smiling. "Just got in at Heathrow."

"We've got one of your countrymen over there." He pointed to the far end of the bar. "Comes in here all the time." He called to a fellow sipping a pint of bitter. "Hey, Jim, here's one of your countrymen over here. Just got in from the States."

"Where are you from?" Jim yelled across the pub.

"Pittsburgh."

"You won't find any *Iron City* here," Jim said and laughed.

"How do you know about *Iron City*?" Mark asked.

"I'm from Cleveland. I used to come down to Pittsburgh when the Browns played the Steelers. I came over here on vacation seven years ago. Liked it so much that I stayed on. You on vacation?"

"You could say that," Mark said.

"Are you a musician?" asked the barkeep, pointing at the mandolin case slung over Mark's shoulder.

"Yeah," Mark answered. "I do folk music. Mostly English stuff."

"Well, you ought to hear the band we've got here on the weekend if you like folk music . . . British folk music," the barman continued. "Not this rock crap, but the real authentic English music. Not many people are playing that these days."

"Yeah," said Jim. "Last weekend I heard someone ask them if they knew any Garth Brooks tunes. That was a howl!"

The barman shook his head, his face twisted in disgust.

"That's why I'm here," said Mark. "A friend of mine called me up to tell me about the All Souls' I'm a real fan of English traditional music as well as the folk rock stuff, you know, like Fairport . . . Since I had some vacation time, I thought I'd fly over and check them out. My friend's name is Richard . . . Richard Rowland."

"We all know him," said the barkeep, frowning. "Bit of a madman, that one. He was jiggling on the tabletops last weekend. We don't go for that sort of thing in here. I thought the manager was going to toss him out on the street."

"That's Richard," Mark said. "When he gets a few in him, he's liable to do anything. Last time I was over here, he tried to get me to go to a leather bar with him. Not my cup of tea, though."

"Is this your second trip, then?" asked Jim, who had moseyed over from the other side of the bar.

"Yeah, answered Mark. "I was here three years ago, looking for my family roots. We're originally from Humberside. I met Richard at a folk club up in Yorkshire. He gets around a bit. He's originally from Wigston, up near Leicester, but moved down here to London about a year ago."

"We know him well around here," said the barman. "Crazy one, that one."

#### 4. Band of Gypsies

"What did I tell you, Mark? Aren't they the most fab folk-rock outfit you've ever heard? Richard was ecstatic, and well into his cups.

"I have to agree," he said, nodding. "And with no sound equipment, no amps. They just tear back and let it rip. That's the way it was done in the old days."

"The good olde days," agreed Richard, "like five hundred years ago." He emptied his pint.

Mark was watching the band. There were eight of them, three girls and five men, a rag tag band of gypsies if he'd ever seen one. Their clothing was a mish-mash of tawdry finery that reminded Mark of hard core hippies from the 60's. Except, the outfits somehow seemed more "authentic" than that. They could have been copied from period clothing, but Mark just wasn't sure of the period. He couldn't pinpoint the era.

The All Souls' Band was a fine collection of multi-talented players and singers. Several of them played two or three different instruments, some that Mark couldn't readily identify.

Roderick was the leader, a tall fellow with a raspy growl to his voice. He strummed ringing chords on his lute.

"That lute has seen better days," Mark commented to Richard, noticing the scratches on the instrument's face."

"Like fine wine," remarked his friend, "it improves with age. That thing looks like it's been around since the days of King Henry."

"Which Henry?" asked the barkeep, who had come to refill Richard's empty pint.

"The Eighth, who else?" said Richard.

"I wonder where he picked it up?" queried Mark.

"He told me that it's been in his family for generations," said the barman. "A real antique. Someone even wrote the words of a song on the back of it . . . in Middle English, no less. Can't hardly make out what it means. Rod does, though. He'll probably sing it later on. Of course, he's updated it so's you can understand the words."

The All Souls' Band finished up the tune, a lively reel and the leader introduced them.

"Good folk of the *Moon Under Water*, I am proud to present to you the All Souls' Band. We've come many a mile for this Reunion Tour and we hope you enjoy our tunes."

"I told you that Roderick looks like a character out of Dickens," said Richard.

"Dickens? More like the crusades," said Mark. "They remind me of extras from 'Monty Python's *Holy Grail*.'"

"Probably been shopping at the charity stores," said the barman. "All kinds of old stuff from the 60's there."

"Is that the 1960's or the 1560's?" Mark asked under his breath.

The band swung into the "Raggle Taggle Gypsies." Yet, it was a version of that old traditional tune that Mark had never heard before. Whereas most renditions began with the gypsies knocking on the door of the Manor, after which the Lady of the house takes off with them for a life of romance and adventure, this one did not. Instead, it began with the Lord of the Manor abducting the girl, who was really really a gypsy, and holding her against her will. It gave the song a whole new slant. In this version, one could easily see why she wanted to dump the "newly wedded Lord, and ride off with the raggle taggle gypsies."

When the song, which had been sung by the dark haired Jon and the little blonde Zara concluded, the pub filled with thunderous applause.

"I told you she sounds like Marianne Faithful in the old days," said Richard.

Mark nodded in agreement. "She's cute, too," he added.

"We're going to take a bit of a break now," boomed Roderick. "Another round of applause for the lovely Zara, and the talented mandolin man, Jaahn!"

After the applause, Roderick set down his lute and headed for the bar.

"A pint of your best cider," the musician said. "And cold."

Jon joined him. "Colder than an executioner's heart," the young man said with a laugh

"That's what Zendt used to say up in Mosside at the Blue Falcon," said Roderick. "Cooled the glasses in an underground stream that ran under the inn."

"Really?" asked the barkeep. "Sorry, we don't have any that cold. This will have to do." He set two pints on the bar.

"Can't have everything," said Jon, and sipped his eider.

"How long are you fellows playing here?" asked Mark.

"Till Saturday," answered Roderick.

"Great, I'm flying out on Sunday. I'll get to hear you a couple of more times." Then Mark turned to the barkeep. "Hey, that's Halloween . . . are you going to have a party, you know, costumes, masks and all that?"

"That's an American holiday . . . we have Bonfire Night coming up on November Fifth . . . you know, Guy Fawkes Day," said Richard.

"Bonfire Night used to be on the last of October," said Roderick, "the pagan festival of Samhain. The bonfires were lit to drive off the spirits of the dead. Somehow the Church incorporated Samhain into All Soul's Day, and then Bonfire Night got moved to November Fifth. Pretty confusing, if you ask me."

"Please to remember," said the barman, "the fifth of November. Gunpowder, treason and plot. I see no reason, why gunpowder, treason, should ever be forgot. It's an old nursery rhyme."

"Is that where you got the name All Souls' Band?" asked Mark, "from All Souls' Day?"

"It was called the All Souls' when we joined. The band has a long standing tradition up in the North, where we're from. There was an All Souls' Band in my grandfather's time," said Jon.

"Even before that," said Roderick. "Old members quit, or retire, or die . . . and someone new replaces them."

"How long have you been in the band?" asked Mark.

"Longer than I care to remember," laughed Roderick. "I'll tell you this . . . there weren't any grey hairs in this beard then." Then his eyes took in Mark's mandolin case lying on the bar.

"Are you a mandolin man?"

Mark nodded. "Not professional. Just a hobby."

"Why don't you come up and sit in with us on the next set?"

"Yeah, Mark. Maybe they'll do 'Matty Groves,'" said Richard.

"Do you know 'Matty Groves'?" asked Mark.

Roderick nodded and was about to speak when Richard interrupted.

"Know 'Matty Groves'?" he said. "You haven't heard 'Matty Groves' till you hear Roderick sing it. Best version I've ever heard."

"That's the one that doesn't seem like it's ever going to end," said the barman. "But it does, and a bloody end at that. How many verses does it have, anyway?"

"Forty," answered Roderick.

"Forty?" said Mark. "Why, the Fairport version has nineteen and I thought that was quite a few for a song."

"I read an article in a music magazine where this chap researched the song. He found a whole group of different versions, going all the way back to the 1600's," said Richard.

"It's much older than that . . ." Roderick began.

"Hey, Roderick!" yelled a fellow from one of the tables. "Are you going to do that old song about the girl who's turning from a swan, and gets shot with an arrow by her sweetheart?"

"Next set," said Jon.

"Polly Vaughn?" asked Mark. "She's not turning from a swan. The guy just thought she was a swan."

"In the more modern versions," said Roderick. "In the oldest versions she was a swan maiden, returning from a tryst with her swan lover. That's why he shot her . . . with an iron-

tipped arrow. Cold iron was deadly to the folk of Faerie."

"You're quite an expert," said Mark, "a regular musicologist."

"No, I just go for the original versions," said Roderick, polishing off his cider.

"Well, get out that mandolin. Let's see if we can't get these folks dancing."

## 5. "Over The Hills And Far Away..."

"What a night," Mark said to himself as he lay back on the soft bed at the Shalimar Hotel. It was the kind of night he'd only dreamed about when he let his imagination run wild. He reached over to the lampstand and stuck a cassette into his tape player. The sounds of the All Souls' Band issued forth. In the midst of the lively dance tune, Mark picked out the sound of his own mandolin, playing a counterpoint to Jon's lead. Roderick's bass heavy chords rang out among the other instruments.

Mark listened to three or four more songs before drifting off to sleep.

He woke out of a sound, dreamless sleep at twenty past four. At first he wondered what had awakened him. A moment later the flushing of the toilet down the hall answered his question.

Twenty minutes later he was still awake. He switched on the light and sat up in bed. He removed the tape from the player, flipped it over and reinserted it in the machine. He used a set of headphones so as not to disturb the other guests.

The first song was a version of "Barbara Ellen" as sung by Zara and one of the other girls. Their voices blended perfectly as the stringed instruments wove a beautiful tapestry behind them. On the break, the other girl, Irunia, played a mournful lead on her fiddle.

"I don't know why some record company doesn't snatch this band up and put them out on CD," Mark said to himself. "They'd make a fortune on them."

When morning came, Mark was still awake, listening to the sound of the All Souls' Band. Since he couldn't sleep, he decided to go out and find some breakfast.

As he walked toward the center of town, Mark was amazed at the neighborhood, which seemed mostly populated by Indians. He saw only a few English people. Most of the dark eyed women wore saris. Posters on the brick walls advertised an Eastern pop singer, Raj somebody, next to ads for the 50's style musical, *Good Rockin' Tonight*.

"No ads for the All Souls' Band," he said out loud.

"No, you won't find any of those," said a feminine voice behind him.

Mary turned to see Zara. She was still wearing her stage costume. Obviously she'd not been home from the night before.

"You did really well last night," she said.

"You did pretty well yourself," Mark said. "I really liked the way you did "Barbara Ellen." I've heard that song done to death in the States . . . they usually call it "Barbara Allen." . . but I've never heard it done the way you did it. It sounded modal."

"I learned it from my grandmother," she said. "It's a common tune in the area our family came from."

"Which is?"

"Over the hills and far away . . ." she said with a laugh. Her eyes twinkled mischievously.

"That sounds like something out of Lord Dunsany or J.R.R. Tolkien," Mark said, "Beyond the fields we know . . ."

"Actually it's Led Zeppelin." She laughed.

"Have you had breakfast yet?" Zara asked, changing the subject. "I'm famished."

"No," Mark answered, "in fact, that's what I'm doing up and about at this hour. I woke up early, and I couldn't go back to sleep. So I decided to try to find a place to grab a bite."

"There's a little place right down here," Zara said, pointing.

They entered a small pub where they found a table near the front windows. They both ordered. Mark looked at Zara, suddenly aware of her prettiness. Long, straight blonde hair framed her face. A varicolored scarf wrapped her head, with a long end trailing down on the right side. The look reminded Mark of hippie girls from his college days in the early 70's. It

also hinted at the Art Noveau styles of the 1920's, such as silent film actresses might affect.

"So what are the All Souls' Band?" he asked. "Hippies? Gypsies? New Age Travellers?"

"Not luppies," she laughed, her eyes sparkling. Mark couldn't readily tell their color. They looked grey, then green, then blue, a curious shifting of light colors. Like the North Sea.

"Not gypsies, either. Except for Lithon. He's really a gypsy, a true Romany. But that's only his stage name, Lithon the Black . . ."

"Like Roderick the Red?" Mark asked.

"Except Lithon found his name on the liner notes of an old T. Rex album . . . *'Lithon the Black rider of stars, tyrannosaurus rex eater of cars . . .'*" Zara laughed. She smiled wanly while she stirred brown sugar into her coffee. "His real name's a secret . . ." she whispered conspiratorially.

"Like a wizard's" Mark said, thinking of Tolkien again. How many names had Gandalf?

"Well, not exactly. But back to your first question. No, we're certainly not New Age Travellers, though we have played for some of them. We're just . . . The All Souls' Band. I don't think you can put us into any category, really."

"You're certainly unique, I can say that for you," Mark said. "I have you tried approaching the record companies, or thought of getting an agent?"

"No!" she said adamantly, looking up from her coffee. She fixed him in a hard gaze of shifting colors. "Roderick says that it isn't necessary, and besides, the music would suffer." Her whole demeanor had become defensive, if not hostile.

"How so?"

"The All Souls' control the music, no one else. If someone else were involved, they'd want to change the music. . . ."

"Not necessarily . . ." Mark began.

"It happened once before, even before Roderick and Jon joined the band. We once had a fellow named Owen. He changed the music. That's why we finally got rid of him." Her tone was icy.

Mark was at a loss for words. He certainly hadn't wanted to offend the girl. He was simply trying to suggest that they do something with their wonderful talent. Suddenly he felt foolish. He hardly knew these people, and here he was, spouting off with advice on their careers. Richard had told him once that this was a very American trait, butting in where you had no business. Americans had been doing it for years.

"I . . . I meant no offence," he stammered. He could feel his face reddening. "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too," she said, a smile coming to her face. "It's just that so many people try to tell us what to do. You'd be surprised how many times we've been told to contact the record companies."

"No doubt so you'll become stars," Mark offered Mark lamely.

"We don't want to become 'stars,'" Zara said. "After all, the only thing that really matters is the music."

"I guess that's so," agreed Mark, half heartedly to himself.

"It's the only thing that does matter," she repeated softly as their breakfast arrived.

## 6. Halloween Night

It was Saturday Night . . . Halloween . . . and *The Moon Under Water* was packed. Mark had just finished playing the second set with the All Souls' Band. Now he was working on a pint. He was feeling pretty good. Zara had smiled at him all evening as he played.

Richard walked up with a pint, already well on his way to oblivion.

"A great set, man," Richard said, clapping him on the back. "I thought Thursday and last night were good, but tonight was bloody unbelievable."

"I'm just really getting to know the tunes," Mark answered.



"Not all you're getting to know, I think," said Richard, winking. "I think you've got a case on that Zara girl."

"Oh, what makes you think that?" Mark asked, his face reddening.

"You can't see yourself! You've been mooning over her like a schoolboy all night, mate."

"Ah, it's not that bad . . ."

"Ah, but yes it is," said Roderick, coming up on the other side of Mark. "You remind me of Jaahn, years ago when he first met Irania. That's before we ever joined the band."

"You mean when Owen was in the band?" Mark queried.

"Who told you about Owen?" Roderick's eyes narrowed. His voice took on a hard edge.

"Zara mentioned him at breakfast yesterday. I was telling her that you ought to approach the record companies, and . . ."

"Best forget you ever heard of Owen," said Roderick brusquely. "A bad lot, that one."

"My apologies," said Mark.

"It's best you forget about Zara too," continued Roderick in a more gentle tone.

"What?" Mark couldn't believe his ears. It wasn't any of Roderick's business.

"It's for your own good. No sense getting all enamoured with her. You're going back to the States, and we're packing it up tonight. . ."

"Tonight? You're leaving tonight?" queried Richard.

"After this next set. We've got to be on the Road by midnight."

"Sounds like bloody Cinderella," said the barkeep with a laugh. "On Halloween, no less. What happens at midnight? Do you turn into a bloomin' pumpkin?"

"Very funny," remarked Roderick dryly. "Just make sure you've got our money ready when we finish the set. He pointed at the barkeep. "I don't want any funny business."

"There will be no funny business," the barkeep said, taking Roderick's empty glass.

"Another pint?"

"No, we've got to start the set. Jaahn, let's go, man. Time to work."

Roderick rounded up the rest of the All Souls' Band. They opened this last set with "Alison Grose," a song about "the ugliest witch in the North Country." It had always been a favorite of Mark's, the Steeleye Span version. This one was quite a bit different.

However, Mark felt depressed. He didn't want to admit it, but it was Roderick's announcement that the band would be leaving before midnight. Mark had hoped to talk to Zara again after the show. Last night, the girls in the band had taken off right after the third set. Mark hadn't had the opportunity to talk to her then. Now it didn't seem that he'd get a chance to talk to her tonight either. Blast Roderick anyway. What was he trying to pull with the heavy-handed advice?

After a half an hour of some of the best folk music Mark had ever heard, Roderick made an announcement.

"My friends, the hour grows late. We have just time for two more songs. . ."

There were cries of protest from all over the pub.

"I'm sorry, but we must be on our way to our next engagement. It has been wonderful playing for you. Perhaps we can come back this way next year. *The Moon Under Water* is certainly one of our favourite pubs in the greater London area. However, we've a pressing engagement in other parts . . . so we leave you with the saga of that handsome man about town who comes to a bad and bloody end . . . "Matty Groves."

There was uproarious applause. This was the song everyone had been waiting all night to hear. Jon and Roderick started off the song with ringing chords and a moment later the entire band jumped in. It was an awesome performance. Mark checked his recorder to make sure this musical moment was being saved for posterity. Everything seemed A.O.K.

Roderick sang the lengthy tale of the vengeful, cuckolded husband who finds his unfaithful wife bedded up with young Matty Groves. In the ensuing verses, the Lord of the Manor dispatches young Matty, as well as his lovely, though faithless wife. Finally (and Mark had never heard a version that included this event), he fell on his sword himself. It was a gruesome piece of work. The last verse rang out with Roderick's raspy voice.

He put the sword upon the floor  
The point was to his breast  
There never were three lovers  
So quickly sent to their rest

The song ended and the pub went wild with applause and raucous yelling. Roderick smiled broadly and bowed. The rest of the All Souls' did likewise.

"And now my friends, a little farewell from the All Souls' Band."  
They began to play their theme:

Come and listen to the All Soul's Band  
Merry are the songs we sing  
We're making that music underneath the stars  
Listen to the mandolin ring

People were clapping their hands in time with the music. A number of patrons were nuzzling near the back door.

Why do I feel so terrible? Mark thought. It's not like I even really know Zara. It's ridiculous. I am acting the schoolboy.

The All Souls' came to the last verse of their song.

The All Souls Band will leave your town  
Long before the winter winds blow  
But they'll return some golden autumn day  
Where do they go? Who knows?

Where do they go? Mark wondered. They never said where they came from. It's weird. Zara was so cryptic . . . over the hills and far away.

One final chorus and the show was over. Mark looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes to midnight.

Cutting it close, he thought, if they want to be on the Road by twelve.

Roderick came over to the bar while the rest of the band quickly gathered up their gear and packed the instruments in their cases. At least they didn't have a PA system and amps to load.

"Well, Mark, it's been a pleasure knowing you and having you sit in." He shook the American's hand. "Perhaps we'll meet again."

"Ah . . . yes," Mark answered absently. He was scanning the crowd for a glimpse of Zara, but it seemed that she had already slipped out. The last of the All Souls', Jon and Lithon were now exiting the pub.

"Here's your money," said the barkeep, handing Roderick a leathern drawstring bag. Roderick shook it. Coins rattled among the paper money.

"Sounds good," he said, grinning. "Profitable for us both."

"Agreed," said the barkeep. "I just wish you'd stay on a couple of weeks longer. We'd fill the house every night . . . especially after that performance tonight. "Matty Groves" was excellent . . . the best you've ever played it."

"Other engagements, my good man," Roderick said. He eyed the clock warily. It was thirteen minutes to twelve. "I've got to be on my way." He turned and hurried to the door. Several well wishers tried to engage him in conversation, but the singer pushed his way through the crowd with his lute case before him.

"Sorry," he said, "no time to talk." They he was out the door and hurrying up the street.

Mark exited the *Moon Under Water*. The night was foggy and a watery half moon hung in the sky, nearly overhead. He looked up the street and spied the retreating figure of Roderick, nearly obscured by the swirling mist.

"Roderick! Wait!"

The troubadour kept walking, not looking back, but moving with purpose. Mark ran

after him, finally catching him. Nearly out of breath, the American asked, "Why didn't you wait when I called?"

"No time. It's almost midnight . . ."

"They won't leave without you. You're the leader."

"They've already left," Roderick said. "I'm the last."

Mark's spirits fell once again, lower than before. He'd hoped to have one final word with Zara. Now it was too late for even that.

"Your song . . . what does it mean in 'The All Souls' Band' . . . 'Where do they go? Who knows?' Where do you go?"

Suspicious were crowding into his mind. Strange, crazy thoughts.

Roderick cast him a sidelong glance and grinned. "Where you can't follow, I'm afraid. Forget her, Mark. And if you can't forget her, write a song about her. That's what a true minstrel does."

They arrived at an ancient churelyard. The tombstones rose up in the mist like stone menhirs of a bygone age. Roderick turned in at the old iron gate. He stopped for a moment.

"You asked about 'Matty Groves' the other night . . ."

Mark recalled. He'd wanted to question Roderick, but they'd been interrupted. They'd never resumed the conversation.

Roderick continued. "You wanted to know the reason I sing verses that no one else does? It's because I do the oldest version of all, the one I wrote. You see, Mark, I knew Matty Groves."

With that, Roderick turned into a shadowy lane between two large, mossy monuments. The fog swirled there in the moonlight, a grey shifting like the light in Zara's eyes.

"You . . . knew . . . wait a minute!" Mark shouted after the retreating figure. "That can't be . . ."

Roderick stopped, turned and waved farewell to Mark. Then the minstrel faded into the mist as the church bells chimed the midnight hour.

Mark ran to the spot where Roderick had stood. The singer had vanished completely. The wet footprints just ceased, as if Roderick had stepped into another world.

"Midnight . . . Halloween . . . the old feast of Samhain . . . when the door opens to the Otherworld," Mark muttered to himself. In his reeling mind he could hear Zara's answer to his questions about her family's origins.

"Over the hills and far away . . ."

He stood between the two ancient monuments in the moonlight and the mist. He felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickle as he thought of Roderick's final words: "I knew Matty Groves."



Come sail away with Tim Powers "on stranger tides." Aye, Matey, you'd be hard pressed to find tides that be stranger. And what a cast of characters: There's the old Oxford don, Benjamin Hurwood, who just happens to carry around a box containing the rotting head of his late wife. Obviously he never believed in the "till death do us part" section of the marriage ceremony.

And then, there's Jack Shandy, once talented puppeteer now turned murderous buccaneer. And none other than old Thatch himself, Blackbeard, who's not only a psychotic killer who blasts the kneecaps off his shipmates just for fun, but also a voodoo priest of the highest degree. He can raise a crew of drowned corpses to sail his ship, the "Queen Anne's Revenge," if he gets low on crew members. And for a compass they use the heads of a two headed dog floating in a bucket of sea water.

Some of the scenes in this masterpiece of terror are not for the faint hearted, me buckos. They make your guts flip flop like you've swallowed a gallon of dirty bilge water. Or some spiced rum mixed with a horn full of black powder. . . just to warm your innards.

You'll meet them all here . . . those wild, colorful freebooters that made the Spanish Main the bloodiest corridor of ocean anywhere on earth. There's Anne Bonny, the red haired Irish spitfire, a queen of pirates. . . Stede Bonnet, gentleman buccaneer. . . Woefully Fat, the blind voodoo man who sees more without eyes than most do with 'em. And amid this barbaric setting, there's a trek through ghost haunted Everglades in search of the Fountain of Youth. But it's not what you, or

anybody else thinks it is. Like so many legends, it hides a horrible reality.

Powers has the extraordinary gift of making the supernatural REAL in a historical context. He's done it before, especially in "The Drawing of the Dark" and "The Stress of Her Regard," one of the five best vampire novels ever written.

'Ar, 'ar, 'ar. Mateys . . . this is one voyage you'll never forget. If your tastes run to weird and swashbuckling adventures, come sail away on stranger tides. . .

Chuck  
Owston



## underflowers

When I was planning this issue many moons ago, I had originally planned to have an interview with Pittsburgh's leading ethereal band, Underflowers. However, many things made this impossible, and as I have not yet gotten their CD, this review will have to do.

At the Third Nail 10th issue party at SIP coffeehouse, J. handed me a 4-song cassette to listen to. It contains four of the songs from their new CD on the Bedazzled label. At SIP the band played an evening of "unplugged" music. The twin 12-string guitars gave an almost harpsichord sound to the proceedings. We were also treated to a visual, as well as aural, experience. The abstract slide show, last seen at the BBT in Spring 1994, was back.

As with their initial cassette release (reviewed in Dark Troubadour #1), this sampling, much like the slide show, gives a variety of the brilliant colors on their musical palette.

"Aurora Ring" -- the cut approximates the "unplugged" sound heard at the Third Nail Party. Very victorian, very haunting. Shadows creep across the room like a grieving maiden in black crepe. The air is still as her footsteps slowly make their way into the haunted crypt. . . This would make a good piece for the soundtrack of a vampire film.

"Wishful Thinking" -- fuzztone guitar sets the mood for this piece. J. Orazi's highly echoed voice and the effects on Tanya's violin remind one of Justin Hayward's more dreamy pieces like "Forever Autumn."

"If Followed" -- Carousel music fades into E-bowed electric guitar, reminiscent of Revelation in Black's "Ruby Tears." The sinuous lines of the multitracked violin sound much like a mellotron. Hypnotic.

"Fallen Times and Starry Eyes" -- I love the title. The very essence of the genre called "ethereal." Ma's vocals echo in lost dimensions of antiquity.

Underflowers (not THE Underflowers, as so many writers call them) will be touring this Spring. Try to catch them at a venue near you.

Chuck Owston

My two favorite memories of 1992 involve Lush. The first is simply seeing their Lollapalooza set and being floored by how powerful and stunning they were at 2 p.m. The other is tripping through a forest in northwestern Pennsylvania with the SPOOKY album blaring through headphones and a humongous smile on my face, even as I fell into a hole and shattered my ankle to bits. Oh yeah, that and being absolutely, pathetically in love with Miki, but oh well. . .

The following album, 1994's SPLIT is one of my all time faves, period. A brilliant complex piece of work, full of seven minute plus opuses and very personal songs about death, loss, friendship and alienation, it was ignored in the then prevalent designer grunge post-Nirvana atmosphere. But it's amazing, trust me.

LOVELIFE is a completely different animal -- a direct punky pop album that tips its hat to all the band's influences, from Cocteau to Beatles to Duran. It also manages to both not its head AND thumb its nose at current Britpop stars like Elastica and Blur, because Miki Berenyi and Emma Anderson seemingly effortlessly come up with the kind of melodies and choruses those bands would kill for.

The more cynical amongst you may see this change of direction as a purely commercial move, but that would be missing the point. These women have an obvious love of music that informs and gives substance to every song they write. I bet they have huge record collections (on vinyl, too!).

For example, "Ladykillers," the opening track marries a Dick Dale surf riff to a prime power pop melody and biting, yet humorous lyrics about "sensitive" ego-driven men (a fave Lush theme and one they seem to know something about). Or "Ciao!", in which Miki and Pulp's Jarvis Cocker tell each other off beautifully, like a nineties Lee Hazelwood-Nancy Sinatra, set against a Niek Cave faux-country backdrop. "Olympia" could be Dusty Springfield on acid in 1968, and if "Simple Girl" doesn't stick in your brain, you're deaf, my friends.

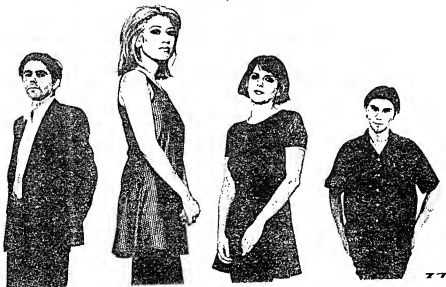
Miki's "Papasan" and Em's "Tra La La" are intensely personal, painful, yet gorgeous songs, while "Last Night", "Heavenly Nobodies" and "The Childcatcher" are more traditional Lush, swirling guitars and stratospheric harmonies galore.

I admit that I miss the artiness and quirkiness of the old Lush. But this is a GREAT album. A perfect pop album. And you don't get many of those these days.

And there's no question in my mind that it is the right album for Lush to have made in 1996.

I can't wait for summer.

-- Dewey Gurali



# PHOTO/ART CREDIT

Photo of Anne Bonnie by Chuck Owston

Anne portrayed by Lucy Van Sickle

Photo of Roderick the Red by Chuck Owston

Roderick portrayed by Rod Willings

Photo of Ronald Chetwynd-Hayes by

Salamander Scarlett

Ronald portrayed by himself

Photo of Owl-Stone the Minstrel by

Self-Timer, Esq

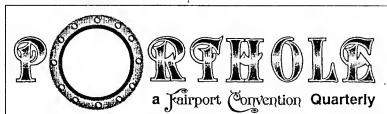
Three pen and ink drawings by Elaine Darcy

Painting of "Ruby Tears" by Chuck Owston

Model: Debbie Rush as the Gothic Vampire Lady

Cover collage by Chuck Owston

Photo of the Dark Troubadour by Dave Morris



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Greetings once again, vampire fans. I have a treat for you! A book. I don't usually review books, but this is not just any book! It is a collection of stories, many of them dealing with vampires, the Cthulhu Mythos, and other gruesomely Gothic delights.

For those of you not familiar with the works of this friend (through correspondence) of the Master, H. P. Lovecraft, this ought to serve as an introduction to the weird, wonderful worlds of Clark Ashton Smith.

There are some of his best tales in this collection, all under one cover. My personal favorites are "The End of the Story," "A Rendezvous In Averroigne," "The Death of Ialotha" and "Genius Loci." This last tale presents us with the idea of a place, that once visited, draws one irresistably back, taking more of the life essence each time until . . . probably partially, but not quite what you think.

The most "classic" vampire story in this volume is the title story, "A Rendezvous in Averroigne." The other two stories mentioned above deal with the Classical Greek "Lamia" type of female vampire, and will haunt the reader for the rest of his or her life!

Another story, "The Lamia Morthylla," deals with this theme in a different, but no less effective way. It's a sad, wistful story to make the Gothic heart ache in sympathy. (One of my favourites ... ed.)

The rest of the tales collected here should also please you, and may just whet your literary appetite for more. Which is fine, as Khlarkash-Ton (as he was jokingly called by Lovecraft, who used to give his friends fanciful Mythos nicknames), wrote over a hundred short stories set in the "real world" as well as the mythical lands of Zothique, Hyperborea, Atlantis and even other planets.

There are enough vampires, sorcerous doings and ghastly goings on for the most jaded dark fantasy fan. This is not splatter. The writing is poetry in prose. Beauty and horror mixed in a splendid brew that may prove addictive.

Arkham House, Publishers, Sauk City Wise. 53583

Salamander Scarlette



Rozz Williams/Gitane Demone -- DREAM HOME  
hEARTACHE

Rozz has come out the other side of the nebulous and hackneyed world he has been living in since the 1993 dissolution of Shadow Project and joined forces with a woman from his distant past. Gitane Demone has been using her versatile talents in many ways since fleeing from Christian Death in 1989, four years after Rozz himself fled. The album opens with a very convincing Brian Ferry voice singing "Every Dream Home a Heartache." At the end Demone takes a hint from Diamanda Galas and substitutes her screaming for the guitar solo. The next song, "These Vulnerable Eyes" is a very gothic paean, blending alliteration with suffering and despair.

"Pope's Egg Hat" is a discursive collection of gothic ramblings which Rozz seems to have regained the talent for doing well. The rest of the album includes an ambient version of Jimi Hendrix's "Manic Depression" and a lovely ballad "Moon Without A Tear" that highlights Demone's seraphic, yet sensual, voice. I was disappointed that the only song with both Williams' and Demone's voices in harmony was the rather badly mixed "A World Apart", which does not do justice to their melodious harmonies that I have heard in snatches on Christian Death bootlegs. Overall, this duo, who I doubted would work together again, have presented a classic set of ambient and tastefully melodramatic songs essential to every modern Goth (even those totally disillusioned with the scene's current state).

I had serious doubts that either of them could pull it off after drug recovery, denunciation of their gothdom, and just plain aging.

God knows many a lesser musician couldn't.

Allison Gurall

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